



# The IAE Digest

*News and Program Updates from  
the Integrated Award Environment*



*Volume 3, Issue 1  
Fall FY2016*

## From the Assistant Commissioner



### A Six Month Check-Up

When I first came to the Integrated Award Environment in July of last year, I was aware that there both had been substantial achievements in the modernization work underway and significant work to be done to transition the ten disparate IAE systems into one, unified environment. The IAE's recent track record and the challenges that lay ahead were the two reasons I couldn't wait to hit the ground running in my new role as the IAE's Assistant Commissioner.

Now that I've been here six months, I'm happy to report that in no way has either the IAE program or the people who make it work disappointed!

The work that went into putting the IAE into the position we're in now – setting us up for future success – was monumental. Like any good program, building a solid foundation is critical; the same holds true here at the IAE. For roughly two years, the IAE staff built the foundation to begin to transition our 10 systems into one streamlined environment – a task with a scope and breadth that aren't commonly found or attempted within federal agencies. They laid down the vision, plotted a path, and began the task of building the road while walking on it at the same time, often in uncharted areas.

Of specific note was the internal transition from traditional waterfall IT methods to what we use today: a modified version of agile methodology. Laying the groundwork for that move was a monumental achievement that is paying great dividends today in everything we do.

Harnessing the hard work and preparation that went into setting the IAE up for great things – and coincidentally coinciding with my arrival on the scene – the past six months have been witness to some truly amazing accomplishments here in this program management office. Using the agile method and completing Releases 1 and 2, in September of 2015, we delivered the Common Services Platform (CSP) infrastructure: a major achievement that is essentially the backbone of the entire new environment. In Release 3, we received GSA's first-ever Authority to Operate (ATO) for a cloud-based Platform-as-a-Service product. As I wrote in [an article](#) right after learning about the approval, the IAE achieving ATO speaks to the technical prowess of our development and operations teams. It also means that our security team and infrastructure is prepared to counter the cyber threats the platform could be facing in the future.

As I write this today, we are coming close to the end of Release 4 and are beginning the planning stages for Release 5. The two Releases are monumental in their own right in that

### In This Issue:

- From the Assistant Commissioner
- IAE Agile Tip
- IAE Participated in FAS Blog Series
- IAE Governance
- The Federal Service Desk
- Quarterly System Updates
- Transition.SAM.gov
- IAE Gathers Input on FPDS-NG
- Ferraro Engages with Veterans
- IAE Kicks Off FY2016 at Key Events
- IAE Team Member Spotlight



## From the Ass't Commissioner (continued)

stakeholders and IAE system users will start to see various functions transitioned to the new environment for the first time; a sign that we are, in fact, well on our way.

At the six-month mark, as I look back over all that has been achieved by the IAE in the recent past and as I look at the roadmap of what's to come, I'm mindful of the myriad day-to-day operations within the office that make it all possible.

Our goal remains, as always, to share our progress and to communicate in an open dialogue with you. Many of you may have attended the recent Industry Day event hosted by the IAE (which you can read more about in this newsletter) where we demonstrated the Common Services Platform Marketplace.

I know that many thousands of you are active with us on our Interact community site. And I know that countless numbers of you are engaged with us through focus groups and similar efforts.

I encourage you to keep the conversation going and to stay involved. If you think the past six months have been exciting, wait 'till you see what we have in store for 2016!

As always, please feel free to get in touch with me and share your thoughts at any time through the IAE Interact community or by emailing me at [IAEOutreach@gsa.gov](mailto:IAEOutreach@gsa.gov).

Eric Ferraro  
Assistant Commissioner  
Integrated Award Environment

## IAE Participates in FAS Blog Series

The Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) within GSA has launched a series on the [GSABlog](#) to highlight various innovations throughout the Service. The IAE is happy to be contributing content to the Innovation Blog Series, including a recent entry about our recent ATO.

In October of 2015, the Common Services Platform (CSP) achieved Authority to Operate (ATO). This was a major milestone for the IAE signifying our cloud platform is secure and ready to do business with the federal award management community. You can read all about it in the [GSABlog](#).

Please continue to check out the [GSABlog](#) for key updates about the IAE.

### In Case You Missed It: Industry Day 9

- Held on December 9, 2015
- Featured IAE IT Director Navin Vembar, who conducted a live demonstration of the Common Services Platform (CSP) Marketplace. The CSP will support functions common to all IAE applications, including identity and access management, data management, search, application programming interface (API) management, developer tools, and cloud management.
- Participants learned how the CSP Marketplace will enable developers to use APIs and other tools to build and deploy applications rapidly.
- Event materials and an archived recording (for this and previous Industry Day presentations) can be accessed are housed on the IAE Interact site [here](#)

Don't miss Industry Day 10! Please join [IAE's Interact community](#) to receive information about our next event.

## IAE Agile Tip: The IAE's Definition of Done

A significant part of the comprehensive transition occurring within the IAE includes the change from traditional waterfall development to a modified version of Agile methodology.

In Agile development there is a concern that inconsistencies can arise from common terms used within teams. A prime example is the term “done,” which can mean many different things to various team members.

Having an agreed-upon Definition of Done is critical for software releases, features, and user stories - all components within our agile development framework. The IAE is using the following characteristics to define Done for Release 5, and for upcoming releases, as appropriate.

The IAE defines Done for a release when:

- All features for the releasable set are done and meet acceptance criteria.
- End-to-end system integration and system/performance testing are done.
- Full regression testing is done (automated where practical).
- There are no must-fix defects.
- User, release, and installation documentation are complete.
- 100% of the features are developed with an Infrastructure-as-Code implementation.
- 100% of the code is open sourceable.
- Feature set is accepted by Product Management.

The IAE defines Done for a feature when:

- Features meet acceptance criteria.
- All stories for the features are done.
- Code deployed to QA/Staging and integration have been tested.

- Functional regression test is complete (automated where practical).
- Non-Functional Requirements are met.
- There are no must-fix defects.
- Documentation related to the feature has been updated.
- Feature is demonstrated in the system.
- Feature is included in the build definition and deployment process.
- Feature is accepted by the Product Owner/Program Managers.

The IAE defines Done for a user story when:

- Stories satisfy the acceptance criteria.
- Acceptance tests and unit tests have passed (automated where practical).
- Cumulative unit tests have passed.
- Non-functional requirements (508, FISMA, Agile Framework, EA Framework, API standards, Coding standards, UX standards) have been met.
- Code checked in, merged into mainline, and published to code repository
- Coding Standards have been followed.
- Code peer has been reviewed.
- Code is deployable to a production environment
- Documentation related to the user story has been updated.
- There are no must-fix defects.
- Story has been accepted by the Product Owner.

## IAE Governance

### Financial Assistance Committee for E-Government (FACE)

Several bodies provide governance and guidance to the IAE program. The Financial Assistance Committee for E-Government (FACE), formerly known as the Grants and Loans committee for E-Government (GLCE), was established to represent the functional needs of the financial assistance community. The FACE serves as the voice for data collection, reporting, and analysis outcomes expected from the IAE's suite of systems. The FACE facilitates decision-making regarding proposed requirements and changes that affect the grant, loans, and financial assistance communities.

The responsibility of the FACE is to make timely decisions to (1) integrate common functional areas across agencies, (2) ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements, and (3) improve the awards management processes for grants, loans, and life-cycle performance across the federal space.

The FACE has two co-chairs and at least one representative from each of the 26 grant-making federal agencies. Together, they are responsible for coordination with the Procurement Committee for E-Government (PCE) and the Award Committee for E-Government (ACE) co-chairs for making decisions on behalf of the federal financial assistance community as they pertain to collecting, using, disseminating, and displaying federal financial assistance.

"With more than \$600 billion in fiscal year 2015 reported so far on federal financial assistance, we are deeply committed to ensure that IAE systems, and eventually the future environment, can absorb and handle increasing levels of user loads and activity," said IAE Assistant

Commissioner Eric Ferraro. "Our continued collaboration and cooperation with FACE representatives are critical to help us design and build such an agile, flexible, and user-centric environment."

The FACE meetings are typically held on the third Wednesday of each month, with additional meetings scheduled as needed. To learn more information about the FACE, please contact [IAEOutreach@gsa.gov](mailto:IAEOutreach@gsa.gov).

### Did You Know? UX Stats

The average focus group gives the IAE User Experience (UX) team 60 user stories documenting user requested enhancements. The UX team files these stories into modernization planning for our applications.





## The Federal Service Desk

The Integrated Award Environment is a multi-disciplinary program office with all manner of highly skilled staff who work on myriad program aspects. Of the many responsibilities within the IAE - including building the new environment and concurrently maintaining the current systems - managing the Federal Service Desk (FSD) is paramount.

The Federal Service Desk (FSD) is the customer support center for many of the IAE's systems. It is a multi-tiered service center that handles more than 1,800 calls a day, varying from inquiries about system password resets to federal acquisition policies. The FSD works with industry partners to make sure that users receive the highest level of customer support and best answers to questions.

The primary goal of the FSD is to provide multiple levels of support to IAE system users through customer support agents. Currently, the FSD is staffed with 114 Tier 1 agents. Last quarter, the Tier 1 agents handled 23,000 calls with an average speed to answer of 38 seconds and a Tier 1 resolution rate of 95 percent.

Customer support agents receive training and cross training for the IAE's multiple systems. This is particularly useful when coverage needs to be ramped up to address an influx of calls to the FSD. Customer support agents also receive system refreshers and knowledge updates whenever there is a system update.

To better serve customer needs with the appropriate level of support, FSD support is split into four tiers.

The first is self-help. Users can reference Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and user manuals on [fsd.gov](http://fsd.gov) anytime they want to resolve inquiries.

The second tier involves assistance from customer support agents. Users can contact FSD agents by phone or chat from 8 AM until 8 PM Eastern time during the workweek. Agents can help users with a variety of topics ranging from resetting passwords to providing information about system outages or problems.

The third tier involves the escalation of calls to upper levels of support for more in-depth analysis. Third tier customer support agents help customers with both technical issues and functional issues.

The fourth tier of support at the FSD is for customers who have questions or inquiries pertaining to federal policy and governance. Tier four inquiries get routed to the IAE policy team in Washington, DC. for response.

The FSD maintains a continuous level of support at two locations: Montgomery, Alabama and London, Kentucky. These locations can support each other if one cannot operate for any reason. For example, the London location handled call volume from the Montgomery location after it closed down because of inclement weather conditions last winter.

Although the call centers are in various locations, the FSD is managed by staff within IAE in Washington, DC. You can read more about the FSD manager in this newsletter in the "Staff Spotlight" section.

For more information about the FSD or to obtain support, please visit [www.fsd.gov](http://www.fsd.gov) or call 866-606-8220 Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET.

## Quarterly System Updates

### System for Award Management

With each software release, we work to improve the System for Award Management (SAM) user experience, improve the quality of information available from SAM, and reduce the burden for those wishing to do business with the U.S. government. We do this through a combination of minor enhancements and fixing known issues. In the October 31st quarterly release, we made improvements that included:

- **Reducing user confusion through email notifications about Delinquent Federal Debt (DFD).** We created an email notification to alert users when their entity is flagged as having DFD subject to the Treasury Offset Program, what the DFD indicator means, and what action to take. We also created another notification to inform users when the debt flag is removed.
- **Increasing the relevance of search results in the Disaster Response Registry Search page.** We added a Location accordion to the Disaster Response Registry Search page. Users will be able to search for entities able to provide disaster relief by entities' physical address, in addition to the other available search criteria.
- **Optimizing usability in the Representations & Certifications with Entity Registration.** We inserted on-screen SAM Assistant text for the Reps and Certs section within an Entity Registration.

- **Improving Core Entity data quality.** We changed the default setting for Country of Incorporation on the General Information page to "Please select a value." All registrants will have to select a country from the drop-down. Those who select United States will then have the option of selecting a State of Incorporation.
- **Improved CAGE/NCAGE Code data quality.** We implemented a validation rule to prevent users from providing their entity's CAGE/NCAGE Code for their Immediate and/or Highest-Level Owner or providing the same CAGE/NCAGE Code for both owners. In either scenario, the user will receive a mandatory error message on the CAGE Ownership Details page.
- **Removed the 90-day grace period to provide international owners' CAGE/NCAGE Code in accordance with FAR Subpart 4.18.** All users who state that their entity has an Immediate or Highest-Level Owner will need to provide the parent's CAGE/NCAGE Code prior to submitting their registration.
- **Added Firm exclusion record to the D&B Monitoring process.** If a DUNS Number associated with an exclusion record is flagged by D&B as having a change to its Legal Business Name or Physical Address, SAM will send the appropriate users an email notification inviting them to review the information from D&B and update the exclusion record if needed.

For additional details, you may find and read the [October 31<sup>st</sup> SAM release notes](#) posted to SAM.gov > General Info > News > Release Notes.

## Quarterly System Updates

### Common Services Platform: Release 4

Using a modified version of agile methodology to build the new environment, the IAE has planned for 10 individual “releases” during which we will complete various tasks and migrations of systems. In the first quarter of 2016, we were immersed in Release 4.

During Release 4, the IAE added new features in the Common Services Platform (CSP) and matured its ability to support a DevOps-driven workflow.

The CSP Marketplace was further enhanced during this release to demonstrate that applications can be built and deployed into developer and test environments that support the IAE. The increasing maturity of the DevOps model ensures that deployment to production is a smooth, repeatable, and heavily automated process.

The IAE also enhanced identity and access management to allow for integration with [connect.gov](http://connect.gov).

Additionally in Release 4, we began the development of the first central business capability supporting the Federal Hierarchy for application role management. The Federal Hierarchy is an application within IAE that allows federal organizations to create and manage a hierarchy for their organization. The hierarchy shares that information with other applications within the IAE.

### IAE By the Numbers

#### Federal Service Desk 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter FY 2016

- Call volume was at an average of 23,945 per month
- Average speed to answer was 38 seconds, compared to the industry standard of 30 seconds
- Average handle/talk time was at approximately 14 minutes (up slightly from 13.5 minutes in Q4 FY2015)
- First call resolution rate increased slightly to 95 percent, exceeding the industry standard of 80 percent

#### System for Award Management 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter FY 2016

- Average number of registrations activated per month:
  - New registrations: 5,938
  - Updated registrations: 40,011
- Average cycle time in 1Q FY2016 was 2.02 days
- Average number of site visits per month was 905,579
- Average number of searches performed per month was 5,028,418

## Transition.SAM.gov: Introducing the Common Landing Page

As work continues throughout the IAE to modernize the ten disparate systems we manage into one streamlined environment, the centerpiece (and certainly most public-facing aspect) of the effort is the common landing page. The home page where all users will start their experience with the new environment is currently in development, and users will have access to the beta version of Transition.SAM.Gov in the near future.

The IAE's User Experience and User interface (UX/UI) team is leading the charge in building the "common landing page" for Transition.SAM.gov. And the groundwork to-date (plus recent accomplishments) is beginning to bear fruit as the landing page is starting to take shape.

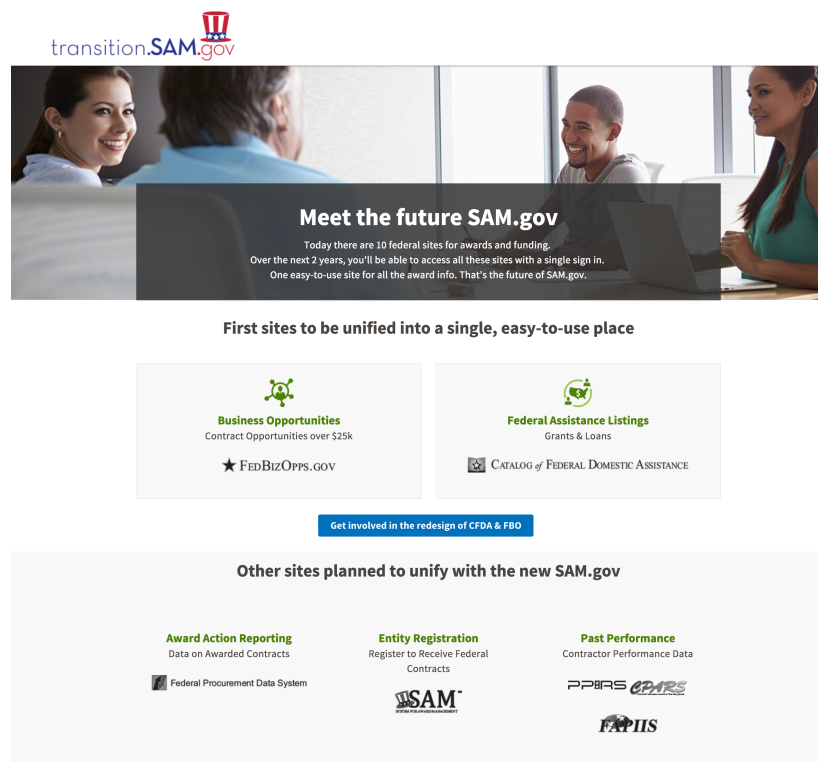
The UX/UI team have been very busy organizing and conducting numerous, ongoing focus groups with government and industry partners to learn what functions and aspects various users want and require in the new environment.

What's more, in the first quarter of 2016, the UX/UI team was able to achieve two additional significant accomplishments. First, they integrated the GSA 18F US Web Standards with IAE's SAM.gov Web Standards - an important step in creating the look-and-feel of the site itself. The team also made those standards publicly available through openIAE's GitHub site. Similar to the relationship between the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and Agency FAR supplements, the SAM.gov Web Standards will build upon the US Web Standards to create a uniform and cohesive user experience for the new Transition.SAM.gov.

The second major advancement this quarter was the transition of legacy system service names to user friendly names that describe the information/action of each application.

For example, instead of Federal Business Opportunities (FBO), the new environment will process "Business Opportunities;" instead of Wage Determination Online (WDOL), the new environment will process "Wages;" and instead of Contractor's Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS), the new environment will process "Past Performance."

This process also includes the registering of domain names/URLs for each application. After months of testing and governance review the new URLs are being registered! Stay tuned for the full listing!







## The IAE Gathers Input about FPDS-NG

In November 2015, IAE began soliciting feedback from users and stakeholders about the Federal Procurement Data System - Next Generation (FPDS-NG) through a series of eight focus groups. The 175 attendees included a wide range of stakeholders, including Congressional staff, agency acquisition representatives, the federal policy community, application integrators, and industry users.

During these sessions, users were asked to share their experiences, pain points, and needs in the areas of user interface, search, reports, data quality, dashboard, support, and roles and access.

Overall, user input centered on five key user experience improvement themes:

- Clear, complete, standardized, and understandable data
- Error detection, correction, and data validation
- Dashboard visibility
- Flexible, intuitive control over search and reporting
- Reduced data entry burden and improve quality at entry point

Our users provided much-needed perspective, pointing out difficulties in understanding terminology, preferred reporting formats, and integration with other IAE systems. As we modernize our systems, this insight will help us ensure we are building a solution that meets the needs of our users.

In the second quarter of fiscal year 2016, the IAE will conduct a follow-up survey with users who were unable to participate in focus groups. We will work with the Change Control Board to prioritize the requested user experience improvements for the rebuild of FPDS.

If you would like to volunteer to participate in IAE focus groups, please e-mail [IAEOutreach@gsa.gov](mailto:IAEOutreach@gsa.gov).

## AC Ferraro Engages with Veterans

The IAE's assistant commissioner Eric Ferraro serves as the chair of GSA's Veterans Small Business Forum. Ferraro's role as chair has allowed the IAE to regularly engage with veteran-owned businesses stakeholders. In the first quarter of 2016, Ferraro had the opportunity to speak at two veterans events.

The first was on November 5 at a contracting officer symposium held at GSA headquarters in Washington. Ferraro spoke about contracting with Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB's). He delivered opening remarks that included statistics about SDVOSB's usage of the System for Award Management (SAM).

GSA also launched an [upgraded website](#) for SDVOSB's this quarter providing valuable resources to this community.

Later in November, Ferraro participated in the National Veterans Small Business Engagement event in Pittsburgh. During the event, Ferraro shared important updates about the IAE's modernization effort and how system improvements will make it easier for U.S. military veterans to do business with the U.S. government. The IAE looks forward to continued engagement with our U.S. military veteran users in the coming year.

## The IAE Kicks Off FY2016 by Detailing Modernization at Key Events

In the first quarter of fiscal year 2016, the IAE shared best practices and key program updates with industry stakeholders and government partners at the following events:

### FedScoop Digital Innovation Summit

The IAE's IT Director Navin Vembar was invited to speak at FedScoop's Digital Innovation Summit on October 14<sup>th</sup> in Washington, D.C.

Vembar spoke about how the IAE's platform and code will be open source and how the modernized environment will allow the IAE to deliver services to users more efficiently.

### ACT-IAC Executive Leadership Conference Innovation Zone

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, IAE's Director of Outreach and Stakeholder Management Judith Zawatsky presented the topic "Can Regulations and Compliance Really Be User Friendly" at the ACT-IAC Executive Leadership Conference's Innovation Zone in Williamsburg, VA.

In her presentation, Zawatsky shared the IAE's experience with gathering extensive user input to inform the development of the modernized environment. Attracting hundreds of attendees from both government and industry, the conference focused on how advancements in technology are enabling transformations in government.



### AgileDC 2015

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, IAE's Christy Hermansen delivered a presentation at AgileDC in Washington, D.C. about how the IAE has used user-centered agile development to transform the way applications are built. Hermansen detailed how user voices and input are integrated in the IAE's large-scale agile development to influence the future environment in a meaningful way.



### ACT-IAC Panel on Acquiring Agile Digital Services

On November 5<sup>th</sup>, Vembar participated in a panel hosted by ACT-IAC about how the acquisition process can be structured to make it easier to acquire agile services while maintaining compliance with the FAR.

In addition to Vembar, the panel featured experts from the Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Digital Service. The topic was at the event was so popular that it will be presented again in January 21, 2016!

## IAE Team Member Spotlight



### Gregory Sizemore

Gregory Sizemore manages the Federal Service Desk (FSD) for the IAE. As a member of the IAE's Outreach and Stakeholder Management team, Sizemore is responsible for the call centers that handle incoming inquiries for:

[System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#)  
[Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance \(CFDA\)](#)  
[Electronic Subcontracting Reporting System \(eSRS\)](#)

[Federal Business Opportunities \(FBO\)](#)  
[Federal Procurement Data System \(FPDS-NG\)](#)  
[FFATA Subaward Reporting System \(FSRS\)](#)  
[Wage Determinations OnLine \(WDOL\)](#)

Sizemore began his career at GSA in 2012 when he worked as a project manager for the Federal Systems Integration and Management Center (FEDSIM), which offers end-to-end, value-added solutions to large scale initiatives including project, acquisition, and financial management support. Soon after assuming his role in FEDSIM, Greg was asked to come to IAE to help manage the FSD based on his extensive prior experience with helpdesks.

"One of my proudest accomplishments at GSA so far has been our ability to truly turn the experience at the Federal Service Desk around for users who call in looking for help," said Sizemore. "I was challenged to make significant improvements for our callers when I first got here. Now, I'm challenged by the constant change and motion at the FSD; every day brings

something new. It definitely keeps you on your toes." Prior to coming to GSA as a federal employee, Sizemore served as a support contractor at GSA for 15 years. During that time, he had the responsibilities of a support manager working directly with users and agents alike. He moved around to various offices and at each stop, was charged with fixing and improving support issues.

"It has been an amazing journey during the past few years here at the IAE," said Sizemore. "Not only have I watched improvements at the FSD but I've also been lucky to witness amazing changes and improvements within the 10 systems that are managed by IAE. Now that everything is beginning to migrate to a common, unified environment, the road ahead is exciting and it is bright."

When not helping IAE system users at the Federal Service Desk, Sizemore spends time with his wife and children in Virginia. His boys are involved in multiple high school sports throughout the year, and therefore, so is Greg!

### Connect with IAE:

- ✓ Join our [Interact community](#) by visiting [interact.gsa.gov](http://interact.gsa.gov)
- ✓ Email [IAEOutreach@gsa.gov](mailto:IAEOutreach@gsa.gov)
- ✓ Suggest content for The IAE Digest using [this form](#)
- ✓ For information and assistance with the systems serviced by the Federal Service Desk, please visit [www.fsd.gov](http://www.fsd.gov)